

Tora Schultz: 'Bitch on Wheels' is a surreal, witty take on a world designed for the male body

From crash test dummies to pitchfork stilettos, Tora Schultz's show 'Bitch on Wheels' at Copenhagen's O—Overgaden is a tragic comedy exploring gender bias, stereotypes, and the surrealism of everyday life



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Tora Schultz: 'Bitch on Wheels', 2022. Installation view, O—Overgaden, Copenhagen (Image credit: Photography: Laura Stamer)

BY ALICE GODWIN

Since Tora Schultz returned to Denmark last year, she has been tremendously busy. Graduating from the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm in 2021, the young Danish artist has had a flurry of exhibitions in Copenhagen at the artist-run space Bizarro and Palace Enterprise gallery. 'Bitch on Wheels' at O-Overgaden marks her first solo outing at a public institution and presents an opportunity to crystallise an artistic vocabulary that has been formulating for some time.

Schultz's sculptures draw upon the objects and structures of everyday life that quietly coerce us into shape. It's only when these designs chafe against a body which lies outside the standardised norm that their bias is revealed. For Schultz, it was an angle grinder in a metal workshop, which she could not grip because it was intended for a larger hand: 'I guess it's these situations where our body meets something that is painful which make you physically realise.'



Tora Schultz: *Eva*, 2022. EvaRid 50th Percentile Female crash test dummy, purple and grey auto-paint, SLS, linoleum
(Image credit: Photography: Laura Stamer)

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One of the key works at O-Overgaden is the prototype of a female crash test dummy, designed by Swedish engineers. It's shocking to hear that historically cars have been tested with the male body as the presumed norm in mind, rendering safety features like seatbelts less effective for women. Aptly called 'Eva' or 'Eve' in English after the first woman, 'her destiny is pretty tragic,' Schultz reflects. 'Her job is to crash into a wall.'

'Eva' is also the name of a chair by the Swedish designer, Bruno Mathsson. Schultz reimagines such designs, so familiar in Scandinavian homes and institutions, to question their subtle influence. She has referred to Magnus Olesen chairs in Danish schools, which make all students sit in the same way, and reframed a Magnus Olesen table and upside-down chair in the sculpture wry titled, *Face down Ass up* (2021). This notion of the framework of a chair or bondage of a seatbelt rendering the body motionless is critical. Schultz considers the tensions within the stilled body and the frozen narratives of objects.

For Schultz, the materials and making of her sculptures are essential. An index of materials gathered in the studio over the years has become like a diary. And while Schultz pays homage to the Surrealist instinct to make the ordinary uncanny, everything she deals with is real. Conversely, Schultz argues it is 'the world that is surreal... how we structure the world is uneven in so many ways.'

Equally important is the collision between tragedy and impish comedy. 'Bitch on Wheels' is a play upon the 'stereotype of women who talk too much and are hysterical,' with Eva the tragicomic heroine literally on wheels, who will not be silenced. The Prada stilettos with pitchfork tips placed inside a dumbwaiter, ordinarily shuttling food from kitchen to restaurant (*The Devil's Contract*, 2021), are the shoes she might use to stomp the tarmac.



Tora Schultz: *Positions*, 2022. Eva Chair in bent beech by Bruno Mathsson, apple, EvaRid shoes Bates Oxford size (Image credit: Photography: Laura Stamer)

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Tora Schultz: *The Devil's Contract*, 2021 (Image credit: Photography: Jean-Baptiste Béranger)

'For a long time, I thought this was going to be a really sober show,' Schultz laughs. Pinocchio with his phallic nose, attached to a strap-on, has become a figure of particular absurdity. Schultz was initially drawn to the dark origins of Pinocchio before Disney recast him as an adorable little boy, and now she cannot escape him. 'He is constantly confronting me!' Schultz jokes. 'Every time someone sees a Pinocchio poster now, they send me a picture.'

As Schultz's career gains momentum, her language of objects continues to formulate. But for now, Schultz has set her sights on Eva. She hopes to forge a new hip for the crash-test dummy that will allow her to stand and liberate Eva from the fate of sitting, only to hurtle into a wall.

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Tora Schultz: 'Bitch on Wheels', 2022.
Installation view, O—Overgaden

(Image credit:
Photography:
Laura Stamer)



Tora Schultz: 'Bitch on Wheels' until 28 Jan 2023, O—Overgaden, Copenhagen. overgaden.org